

# Jimsy the Christmas Kid

Leona  
Dalrymple





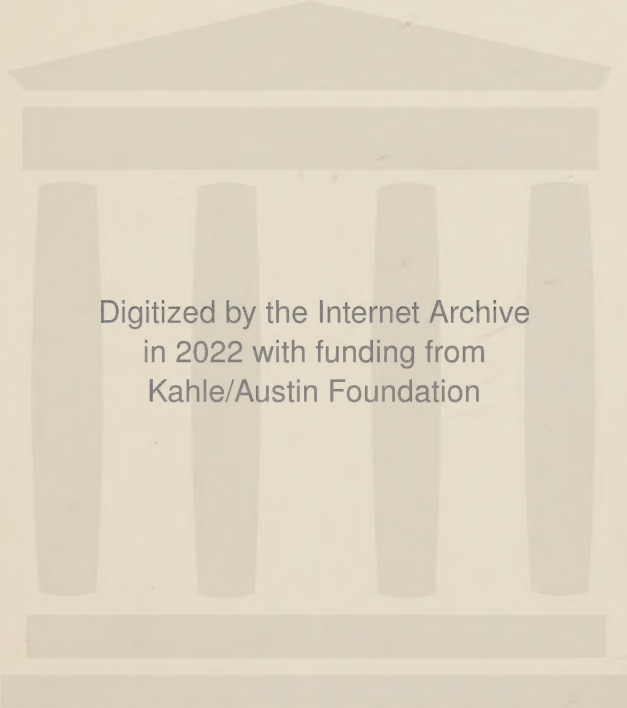




**Jimmy**

**The Christmas Kid**





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“Christmas had not come so this many a year.”



# Jimmy

## The Christmas Kid

By

Leona Dalrymple

Author of "The Lovable Meddler," "Plane  
of the Green Van," "Nucle Noah's  
Christmas Party," etc.

Decorations by

Charles Guischard



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Jimmy

The Christmas Kid







## Jimsy, The Christmas Kid

### I

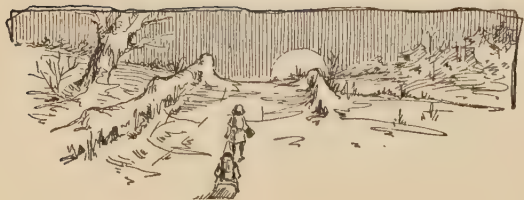
#### THE INVASION

**H**IS name was Jimsy and he took it for granted that you liked him. That made things difficult from the very start — that and the fact that he arrived in the village two days before Christmas strung to such a holiday pitch of expectation that, if you were a respectable, bewhiskered first citizen like Jimsy's host, you felt the cut-and-dried dignity of a season which unflinching thrift had taught you to pare of all its glittering non-essentials, threatened by his bubbling air of faith in something wonderful to happen.

## Jimmy, the Christmas Kid

He had arrived at twilight, just as the first citizen was about to read his evening paper, and he had made a great deal of noise, yelling back at old Austin White, whose sleigh had conveyed him from the station to the house, a "S'long, Uncle!" pregnant with the friendliness of a conversational ride. He had scraped away his snow-heels with a somewhat sustained noise, born perhaps of shyness, and now, as he stood in the center of the prim, old-fashioned room, a thin, eager youngster not too warmly clad for the bite of the New England wind, Abner Sawyer felt with a sense of shock that this city urchin whom Judith had promised to "Christmas," detracted, in some ridiculous manner, from the respectability of the room. He was an inharmonious note in its staid preciseness. Moreover, it was evident from the frank friendliness of his dark, gray eyes that he was perniciously of that type who frolic through a frosty, first-citizen aura of informality and give and accept friendship as a matter of course.

"What — what is your name?"



## The Invasion

asked the first citizen, peering over his spectacles. He wished that Judith's Christmas protégé was not so thin and a trifle larger.

"Jimsy," answered the boy. "An' Specks, he's me chum; he goes to Mister Middleton's, next door."

Specks and Jimsy! The first citizen helplessly cleared his throat and summoned Judith.

She came in a spotless apron no whiter than her hair. She was spare — Aunt Judith Sawyer — spare and patient as the wife of a provident man may well be who sees no need for servants, and her primness was of a gentler, vaguer sort than that of Abner Sawyer. Jimsy glanced up into her sweet, tired face and his eager eyes claimed her with a bewildering smile of welcome. Then because Jimsy's experience with clean aprons and trimly parted hair was negligible almost to the point of non-existence, it became instantly imperative that he should polish the toe of one worn shoe with the sole of the other and study the result and Aunt Judith with furtive interest.



## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

"Judith," said the first citizen, not wholly at his ease, "Mr.—er—ah—Mr. Jimsey has arrived."

Jimsey snickered.

"Naw, naw, nix!" he said. "Jimsey's the handle. I'm a stray, I am. Hain't got no folks. Mom Dorgan says ye have to have folks to have a bunch-name. I'm the Christmas kid."

"To be sure you are," said Aunt Judith gently, "to be sure. And where are your things?"

Jimsey's thin little face reddened.

"Hain't only got one rig," he mumbled, "an' that warn't fitten to wear. Mom Dorgan borried these duds fur me. She—she's awful good that way when she's sober."

There was wistful eagerness in his face to do his best by the one friend who helped him.

Quite unconscious of the scandalized flutter in this quiet room whose oval portraits of ancestral Sawyers might well have tumbled down at the notion of any one being anything but sober, the boy moved closer to the fire as if the ride had chilled him.





## The Invasion

"Gee!" he said with a long, quivering breath, "ain't that a fire, now, ain't it!" and because his keen young eyes could not somehow be evaded, Abner Sawyer accepted the responsibility of the reply and said hastily that it was. Then feeling his dignity imperilled in the presence of Judith, though why he could not for the life of him explain, he moved forward a chair for the Christmas guest and returned to his paper.

Aunt Judith went back to a region of tinkling china and humming kettle. The room became quiet enough for any one to read, but the first citizen somehow could not read. He was ridiculously conscious of that tense little figure by the fire with the disturbingly friendly eyes. How on earth could a boy be noisy who was absolutely quiet? Yet his very presence seemed to clamor — the clamor of an inherent sociability repressed with difficulty.

Jimsey glanced at the checkerboard window beyond which snowy hills lay beneath a sunset afterglow.

"Gee whiz!" he burst forth.  
"Ain't the snow white!"



## Jimmy, the Christmas Kid

The first citizen jumped — much as one may jump when he has waited in nerve-racking suspense for a pistol shot. The boy had done exactly what he had expected him to do — broken that sacred ante-prandial hour with the *London Evening News* which Judith had not broken this twenty years.

"Snow," he said discouragingly, for all he had determined to ignore the remark, "snow is always white."

Jimmy shook his head.

"Naw," he said. "N'York snow's gray an' dirty. Specks said the snow we seen on the hills from the train window was Christmas card snow, and with that the minister he up an' tells Specks an' me 'bout reg'lar old-fashioned country Christmases, fire like this an' Christmas trees an'— an' sleigh-bells an' gifts an' wreaths an' skatin' an' holly — Gee —"

"That," said Abner Sawyer with cold finality, "will be quite enough."

"Sure," agreed Jimmy. "A Christmas like that 'snuff fur any kid."

Irritably conscious that his reproof had been misinterpreted, the first citi-



## The Invasion

zen riveted his gaze upon the *Lindon Evening News*. But he could not read. Jimsy's irreverent air of friendliness was not the only disturbing factor in his Christmasing. Jimsy, plainly, was cherishing expectations.

Conscious-driven, Abner Sawyer laid aside his paper.

"James," he began primly, "I must take this occasion to inform you that Mrs. Sawyer and I spend Christmas quietly — very quietly. We have never had a Christmas tree, and personally I consider that holly is most suitable and decorative where Nature planted it. "Christmas," finished Mr. Sawyer, slightly disconcerted by Jimsy's attentive stare, "Christmas is merely a day and a dinner. Let the frivolous make of it an orgy of sentimentality if they will."

Jimsy's face fell.

"Gee!" he said, "your Christmas ain't just an extra Sunday, is it?"

Shocked, Abner Sawyer glinted over the tops of his glasses.

"No," he said with an effort, "it — it is somewhat different."

"How's it different?"



## Jimsy, the Christmas Kid



"I"—the first citizen froze—"I hardly know."

"What d'ye have that ye don't have Sundays?"

"I—I believe it's turkey," conceded Mr. Sawyer desperately, and feeling his dignity hopelessly compromised by a dialogue of such pronounced informality, returned to his paper.

"Gee!" said Jimsy, with a sigh of relief, "that's mos' enuff itself to make a Christmas. Hain't never tasted turkey." He was silent a minute, in which the clock ticked loudly. It was purple now beyond the old-fashioned panes and the lamp seemed brighter. Jimsy's shrill young voice broke the quiet, as it would, of course, be sure to do.

"Say," he said kindly, "don't you worry none about that there Christmas tree an' no holly. We'll have a thump-walloper of a day, anyhow!"

It is conceivable that Abner Sawyer's experience with thump-wallopers had been limited. There was something in the boy's words, however, that brought his gaze over the top of his spectacles again and over his paper. It was dis-

## The Invasion

concerting to note that Jimsy still bristled with faith and friendliness and cheerful expectation.

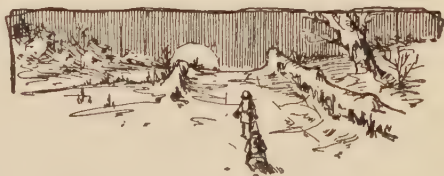
"My remark," he said coldly, "about the absence of a tree and holly was a statement — not an apology."

"Don't get ye," admitted Jimsy. "Come again." And there was danger of a mutual dead-lock of comprehension. Aunt Judith saved the day. Arriving in the doorway with a flutter, she said that supper was ready and that James had better wash his face and hands. And James, who was Jimsy, meeting Aunt Judith's gentle eyes, turned scarlet, and stumbling to his feet, he stepped, en route, upon the stately toe of Lindon's pride.

"Gee!" he burst forth contritely. "I'm awful sorry, honest Injun I am. Spoiled yer shine, didn't I? An' it was a beaut, too!"

Could even a first citizen rebuke such eager apology? Better to stay within the certain shelter of a chilling silence.

Abner Sawyer rose, but even as he did so his world of law and order seemed to rock in chaos about his feet. He

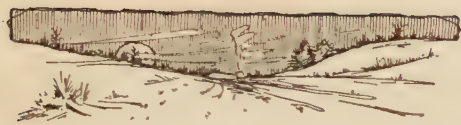




## Jimmy, the Christmas Kid

was going out to supper — and he had not read a single line in the *London Evening News!*





## II

### THE BISCUIT LINK

IT was at supper that the terrible realization came to Abner Sawyer that Jimsy liked everything and *every one* rather too well. He liked the ham and he liked the biscuits, he accepted alarming quantities of marmalade with utter confidence in his digestion; his round eyes swept every nook of the prim old room and marveled at old-fashioned china and silver that might have come over in the *Mayflower*, and then again might not, and he continued irreverently unaware that the first citizen was president of the Lindon Bank and therefore not a person to be liked indiscriminately by urchins. Thanks to something in Aunt Judith's eyes, furtively concessional to boyhood, Jimsy had mislaid what little constraint and shyness he had had at first. His at-homeness might be gauged at a glance by the way he gazed at the biscuits.

## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

"Dear me," said Aunt Judith, glancing from Jimsey to the biscuits to see which most threatened the other, "I — I scarcely think — I hardly know. Abner?"

Time, Abner, now to impress this urchin once for all with a show of power in terms he can understand!

Mr. Sawyer settled the trivial question of biscuits with dignity.

"James," he said. "You may have just *one* more biscuit."

And Aunt Judith nodded:

"Just as you say, my dear!" as she had been nodding effasively for thirty years.

Jimsey's eyes were very grateful and it came over the first citizen with sickening conviction that Jimsey, misinterpreting again, had regarded the biscuit as an overture instead of a show of power. Ridiculous indeed to have thrown about your neck the unwelcome chain of a boy's regard and then unintentionally to cement that chain — by a biscuit!

Abner Sawyer departed hastily for his lamp, his fire and his paper.

Jimsey followed Aunt Judith to the



## The Biscuit Link

kitchen and here, in the shining quiet of an old-fashioned kitchen whose spotless rows of pans and its rocker by the window reflected nothing of first citizenship, the memory-making mystery of child and woman in a homely setting drew taut an age-old chord of sympathy. Out of the hum of the kettle and the fire-shadows of the grate it came, out of the winter wind that rattled the checkerpaned windows — that eternal something that is only given to women to understand. Jimsy did not know why Aunt Judith smiled or why the smile made his throat hurt a little. He only knew by her eyes that she liked him and that was enough.

“Aunt Judith,” he blurted, “lemme — aw, lemme wipe your dishes.”

But Aunt Judith, with the wisdom of women, knew that the best-behaved china is perversely given to leaping without warning out of the hands of any boy, to his utter consternation, and she patted him on the back.

“Bless your heart, Jimsy,” she said, “there are so few I can do them myself in no time.”

Jimsy! — not James! Jimsy felt that



## Jimmy, the Christmas Kid



he must do something for Aunt Judith Sawyer or his throat would burst. So finding one leg at liberty, he furtively kicked the leg of the stove and hurt his toe, even as his eyes fell upon a depleted stock of kindlings in the wood-box.

"Well, then," he burst out in a glow of good-will, "lemme — lemme take Uncle Ab's job to-night an' get the wood."

Aunt Judith's horrified glance made him redden uncomfortably.

"Jimmy," she whispered hurriedly, "you — you must never — never call Mr. Sawyer — Uncle Ab. Nobody does."

"But," mumbled the boy, "ye — ye said folks call ye Aunt Judith, an' — an' —"

"It — it's different," faltered Aunt Judith. "I — I'm nobody in particular. Mr. Sawyer's a bank president, Jimmy, and I — I always get the wood myself." She opened the door and pointed to a woodpile glimmering out of the darkness with a rim of snow. "The kindlings are split and piled in



## The Biscuit Link

the shed. And hurry, child. The wind's sharp."

Jimsey set forth with a noisy whistle. When presently he returned with an armful of kindlings, his eyes were shining. And holding the door ajar, he coaxed into the warmth of Aunt Judith's kitchen a shivering dog, little and lame and thin.

"Aunt Judith," he shrilled, dropping his kindlings into the box with a clatter, "look! He was out there under the woodpile, shiverin,' an' he won't go away. He's astray, too, like I was afore Mom Dorgan gave me a bed with her kids." He patted the dog's head. "Gee, watch him duck, poor mut! That's cause he's been walloped so much. Aunt Judith," he blurted, his gray eyes ablaze with pleading, "can't ye maybe jus' let him sleep behind the stove? He's so sort of shivery I — I feel awful sorry fur him."

"No, no, no!" said Aunt Judith in distress. "I can't. I can't, indeed. Mr. Sawyer —"

"JAMES!"





## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

Aunt Judith and Jimsey jumped. The first citizen stood in the doorway, the *Lindon Evening News* in his hand, still unread. Nor could he have explained why, save that a boy's absence may, queerly enough, be as clamorous as his presence. With the biscuit still upon his mind, Abner Sawyer felt impelled to discipline.

"Put the dog out!"

Jimsey stood his ground. He was used to that. And Abner Sawyer wondered with a feeling of intense annoyance what there was about this ragged, noisy child that injected drama into incident. There was a tenseness in the silence of the trio and the cringing dog.

"Aw, have a heart!" pleaded Jimsey finally, and there was faith and optimism in his steady glance.

Abner Sawyer cleared his throat and looked away. He wondered why he felt defensive.

"I am fully equipped with the organ you mention," he said drily. "Put the dog out."

Jimsey reluctantly obeyed, and as the door closed upon the shivering little

## The Biscuit Link

waif, who scratched and whined at the door of his lost Paradise, Jimsy's face, sharpened by disappointment, seemed suddenly thinner and less boyish. Bent upon making the best of things, he reached for his cap.

"Well," he said casually, "guess I'll go out and look the burg over."

It was queer how Jimsy's conversation seemed to bristle with verbal shocks. Aunt Judith gasped. Mr. Sawyer fixed a stern eye upon the clock.

"It is eight o'clock," he said in what seemed to Jimsy's puzzled comprehension a midnight tone of voice; "you will go to bed."

Dumfounded, Jimsy followed Aunt Judith up to bed. Here in a great, old-fashioned bedroom he forgot everything in an eager contemplation of a whirling, feathery background to his window.

"Aunt Judith," he called excitedly, "it's snowin'. Gee, that's Christmasy, ain't it! I don't mind the snow at all s'long's I got a bed cinched." His eager face lengthened. "Wisht Stump had a bed," he finished wistfully.

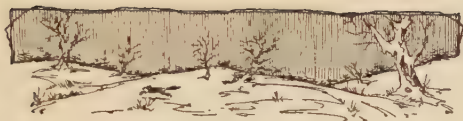
"Stump?"



## Jimsy, the Christmas Kid

"I jus' called him Stump, Aunt Judith, 'cause he didn't have no tail." Aunt Judith's eyes were sympathetic.

But an embarrassing difficulty arose about Jimsy's bed attire which drove Stump for a time from his mind. It was solved by a night-shirt of first-citizen primness, which trailed upon the carpet and made him snigger self-consciously behind his hand until he heard Aunt Judith's step again beyond the door, when he vaulted into bed, shivering luxuriously in the chill softness of unaccustomed linen. . . . And then Aunt Judith blew out the lamp and tucked him in with hands so tremulous and gentle that his throat troubled him again, and he lay very still. Meeting her eyes, he suddenly buried his face in the pillow with a gulp and a sob, and clung to her hand. Aunt Judith, shaking, caught him wildly in her arms, cried very hard, and kissed him good-night. Jimsy, Stump and Aunt Judith Sawyer knew variously the meaning of starvation.



### III

#### THE CHAIN GROWS

THE house grew very still. Jimsy, awaking after a time with the start of unfamiliar surroundings, heard the rattle of wind and snow against his window. A tree brushed monotonously against the panes — then through the sounds of winter storm came an unmistakable whimper and a howl. The boy sat up. Stump! Huddled likely against the door in an agony of faith. Jimsy thought of a winter night before Mom Dorgan had taken him in, and shivered. The howl came again. Rising, Jimsy opened his door on a crack and peered cautiously through it. The hallway was dimly alight from a lamp, set, for safety's sake, within a pewter bowl. The house of Sawyer slept. Gathering his train in his hand, Jimsy hurried through the hall and down the stairs to the lower floor, quite dark now,

## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid



save for barred patches of window framing ghostly landscapes. A gust of wind and snow whirled in as he unbarred the kitchen door. Then something with an ingratiating waggle pushed gladly against his feet. Five seconds later Jimsey and Stump were on their way upstairs.

Excitement exacted its toll. Jimsey halted at the second turn in the upper hall, his scalp feeling very queer. The lamp had gone out, probably in the draft from the kitchen door, and he had lost his room! Whispering desperate admonitions to the wriggling dog beneath his arm, Jimsey went on tiptoed hunt until, finding a window, a turn and a door that seemed familiar, he heaved a great sigh of relief and turned the knob. As he pushed back the door, a flood of light and warmth fanned out, and Jimsey, tangling his feet in his train as only a small boy could, fell headlong into the room, propelling Stump, who yelped with fright, at the very feet of Abner Sawyer.

"Oh, my Gosh!" yelled Jimsey wildly. "Pinched!"

## The Chain Grows

Outraged, the first citizen rose from a bench beside a table and a lamp, and Jimsy, scrambling to his feet, a ridiculous figure of apology and dismay in his billowing train and sagging shoulders, saw that Mr. Sawyer held in his hand a plane and a piece of wood and that the room in which he stood was a work-shop perfect in equipment.



"What," demanded Mr. Sawyer in a terrible voice, "what does this mean? That dog —"

But Jimsy had not heard.

"Lordy," he breathed, "what a thumpwalloper of a shop! Whisht Jack Sweeny could see this. My, wouldn't his good eye open! Whatcha makin'?"

Mr. Sawyer reddened as any man may whose weakness has been unexpectedly detected by a boy in an acre of night-shirt.

"No one," he began icily, "*no* one — not even Mrs. Sawyer presumes to come beyond that threshold" — he broke off and frowned impatiently, feeling his power of aloofness threatened by something in Jimsy's eager stare which



## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

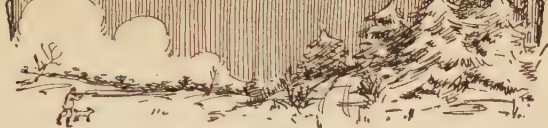
claimed a kinship of interest. . . . There was an alarming suggestion of intimacy anyway in a midnight scene with a tailless dog, a boy clad in your own night-shirt — and an inferential person with an eye by the name of Sweeny. . . . Why did a ridiculous frozen sense of guilt impede his tongue now when rebuke was imperative? . . . Why on earth had a look of relief and understanding supplanted the puzzled friendliness of Jimsey's supper-time stare? . . . So might a dog look who had waggled in friendly perplexity at the foot of a flawless statue only to find that the statue held in its hand a lowly but perfectly comprehensible bone . . . and the dog's attitude of course toward the flawless statue would never be quite the same — nor —

"James," said the first citizen hoarsely, "go to bed!"

"Aw," said James softly, "make it Jimsey. Aunt Judith did. I ain't no stiff wit' spinach an' buttons chasin' newsies off the porch."

"Jimsey!" said the first citizen faintly, and felt his world rock about





## The Chain Grows

him again. For fate and Jimsy, it was very plain, had filed the word away with the biscuit.

Jimsy's grin was radiant. Upset, Mr. Sawyer turned back to his bench with Jimsy at his heels.

"Oh, Lordy, Lordy," breathed the boy in an ecstasy of admiration. "Makin' a Christmas present fur Aunt Judith on the sly, ain't ye? Won't she jus' open her eyes! *I* bet! And pol-  
ishin' the wood yerself. Gee!"

Mr. Sawyer cleared his throat.

"Mrs. Sawyer and I," said he, "do—not—exchange—gifts—at Christmas. This cabinet is for my private office at the bank."

Jimsy's face fell.

"Aw," he said gently, "seems like ye'd orta give her sumthin' fur Christmas. She's so awful good. . . . B'long to the union?"

"I—I beg your pardon?"

"Carpenters' union. Jack Sweeny does."

The first citizen froze.

"Carpentering with me," he explained stiffly, "is a fad—not an oc-

## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

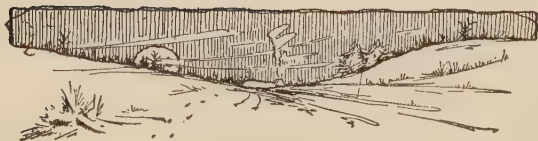
cupation or a necessity. I," he added, "am President of the Lindon Bank."

Jimsey's glance was sympathetic. It regretted the world's gain of a bank-president at the expense of a better carpenter.

"I kin plane," he pleaded eagerly. "Honest Injun, I kin. I kin whittle, too, like ol' Scratch. Lemme plane this —"

"I thank you," began Mr. Sawyer coldly, with unfortunate selection of words, "but —" His voice faltered under Jimsey's shining gaze. For, reading in the formal repudiation a vote of thanks, Jimsey had seized a plane and set to work.

The shavings flew. The clock ticked loudly in the quiet. Outside a winter blizzard was sweeping in white fury from the hills. Stump crouched silently in a corner, his head upon his paws. And Abner Sawyer, returning to his work in helpless indecision, felt his privacy and his dignity forever compromised by a boy and a dog. He knew of course that a small boy, scantily clad, should not be planing furiously on the



## The Chain Grows

bench beside him at midnight with a sociable gleam in his eye — yet — something — a terrible conviction perhaps that if he spoke at all his voice would be hoarse and uncertain and his poise threatened by the paralyzing sense of apology which welled strangely up within him in Jimsy's presence, tied his tongue. The minutes ticked loudly on and the shavings flew. . . . And Jimsy would misinterpret whatever he said in terms of sentimentality. He always did. . . . The clock struck one. . . . Abner Sawyer rose.

"James — Jimsy," he said, and his voice was hoarse and uncertain as he knew it would be, "you must go to bed."

Jimsy looked up sympathetically.

"Got a cold?"

"No."

"Frog in your throat?"

"No."

Jimsy resigned his plane with a sigh.

"Golly," he laughed, "we'd catch it, wouldn't we — me and you — if Aunt Judith knew!"

Then he glanced at Stump and said



## Jimsy, the Christmas Kid

nothing at all. And quite suddenly conscience told Abner Sawyer that he could not accept without giving. Jimsy had helped him willingly and he had accepted — why he could not for the life of him remember, save that it had something to do with his throat and his poise. It did entail obligation of a sort, however, and he was a just man. Abner Sawyer did not look at Stump. He blew out the light.

In silence the two passed out and closed the door. The episodic irregularities of the evening beginning with the *Lindon Evening News* had reached unheard of climax. A mongrel dog was asleep in the warmth of the sanctum.

Abner Sawyer had a strangling sense of another link to his biscuit-riven chain and passed his hand over his forehead in a dazed and weary way.

"Abner," said Aunt Judith nervously at breakfast, "you — you don't think this once we — could have — a — a Christmas tree for Jimsy?"

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Sawyer coldly.

Aunt Judith's hand trembled a little





## The Chain Grows

as she poured the coffee and the first citizen waited so long for her usual reply that he thought impatiently it would never come. It came at last — quietly.

“Just as you — say, Abner.” But the final word was lost in an outraged yell from somewhere near the wood-pile.

“It — it must be Jimsy,” said Aunt Judith hurriedly. “He — he was up so early I gave him his breakfast. He’s shoveling the snow from the walks —”

“Gwan!” came a muffled roar. “Say that again and I’ll bust yer face good.” Sounds of battle and vilifying repartee speedily upset the Sawyer breakfast. Abner Sawyer pushed back his chair and strode hastily to the kitchen window. He saw concentric circles of fists and snow and a yapping dog. He could not know that the defensive section of the maelstrom was Specks, the Christmas urchin next door, or that Jimsy and Specks settled every controversy under Heaven in a fashion of their own.

The first citizen flung up the window.

“James!” he said in a terrible voice.

## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

The concentric circles wavered — then whirled dizzily on.

“James!” Too much conventional horror and dignity there to pierce the elemental.

“*Jimsey!*” There was sharp informality now that meant business. Jimsey upset his freckled antagonist in the snow and wheeled.

“Mister Sawyer,” he yelled indignantly, “he went an’ said ye was an ol’ crab — an’ a miser — an’ a skinflint — an’ — an’ a stiff — an’ I blacked his eye fur him an’ tol’ him he lied. An’ he went an’ said ye didn’t have no heart or ye wouldn’t let Aunt Judith carry in the wood an’ do all the work an’ never git no new clothes —”

“Yi! Yi! Yi! Yi!” derided Specks. “Boney Middleton tol’ me — Boney Middleton tol’ me. You won’t have no tree or nuthin’.”

“Didn’t I tell ye ’bout the biscuit?” demanded Jimsey fiercely. “An’ about Stump sleepin’ in the workshop, didn’t I? Hain’t that enuff? Hain’t he good to boys an’ dogs? I — I don’t want no

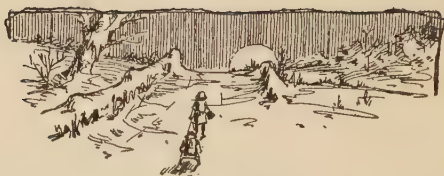
## The Chain Grows

Christmas tree, ye big stiff. I'm goin' to have turkey —"

But Abner Sawyer had closed the window with a bang. Although he did not look at Aunt Judith he knew that her face was white.







## IV

### THE CHAIN CLANKS

IT was the day before Christmas that the Village Conscience telephoned the Lindon Bank.

"I felt that I must call you up, Mr. Sawyer," she said firmly, "and tell you that the boy you have with you over Christmas is going around from door to door, ringing the bell and — *begging!*"

"Begging!"

"Perhaps I shouldn't call it *just* that — but — well, saying 'Merry Christmas!' rather hopefully."

Feeling rather sick, Abner Sawyer formally thanked his informer and rang off. Glancing out of his office window he saw with a shock that instead of Austin White, who usually drove him home at night, Jimsy and Peggy, the old Sawyer mare, were waiting beneath a snow-ridged elm with the sleigh. Jimsy

## The Chain Clanks

caught his eye, smiled warmly and waved, and because Abner Sawyer did not know what else to do, he stiffly returned the salute and reached for his hat, irritably conscious that sufficient sleep and food had already left their marks upon his guest. Jimsy's cheeks above the old-fashioned tippet Aunt Judith had wound about his throat were smooth and ruddy.

"Aunt Judith didn't want me to come," explained Jimsy, "but I tol' her how Gink Gunnigan often let me drive his truck an' I guess I coaxed so hard she had to. . . . Unc — Mister Sawyer, it — it's nearly Chris'mus eve!"

Abner Sawyer climbed in without a word. Peggy flew off with a jingle of bells through the village, through the woods, through a Christmas eve twilight dotted now with homely squares of light shining jewel-wise among the snowy trees.

"Jimsy!"

"Yes, sir?"

"A lady telephoned that you'd been — *begging* — from door to door."

Jimsy hung his head.



## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

"I — I only rung some door-bells an' said 'Merry Chris'mus.'"

"You expected and received — money?"

"Y-e-e-e-es, sir."

"Why?"

Silence.

"Jimsey, I insist upon an explanation."

Jimsey gulped and faced Abner Sawyer, his eyes blazing with heartbroken disappointment through tear-wet lashes.

"Uncle Ab," he choked, "it — it was a Chris'mus s'prise fur you an' Aunt Judith." A great tear rolled slowly down upon the tippet. "I — I seen a book on fancy carpenterin' an' I — I didn't have no money an' — an' a thimble. It ain't silver, but it's 'mos' as good." And then Jimsey lost his moorings with a sob and cried his heart out upon the sleeve of Abner Sawyer. "I — I got the book buttoned under my coat," he blurted after a while, "an', Uncle Ab, I'm awful sorry 'bout the door-bells. All the fellus do it home —"

Abner Sawyer would have been less



## The Chain Clanks

than human if the boy's tragedy had not touched him.

"Why," he asked huskily, "why did you wish to give me a Christmas present?"

"Because," cried Jimsy passionately, "yer so awful good to me an' Stump, an' so's Aunt Judith. An' I thought mebbe ye'd never had nobuddy ever give ye a present an' mean it like I did or —"

"Or what, Jimsy?"

"Ye'd feel diffrent 'bout Christmas."

The first citizen took the reins himself, tucked Jimsy in beneath the fur robe and drove home in silence, conscious only that the world was awry and he hated the Village Conscience. Nor was he quite himself even after supper was done and Jimsy, a little tearful still in his disappointment, safe in bed.

"Abner —" began Aunt Judith from her chair by the fire.

"Yes?" said Mr. Sawyer coldly. He wished Judith would not talk. She rarely did. He was tired and upset and probing desperately within for some remnant of the cold complacence of a week ago.



## Jimzy, the Christmas Kid

"The minister was here to-day. He — he told me how Mrs. Dorgan took Jimzy in 'from the street. She — drinks. He — hasn't — a real — home. The minister would like — to — to find one for him."



Jimzy again! He must fling away his chain now or feel it clank.

"That," said Abner Sawyer resentfully, "is of no interest to me."

There was pitiful, hard-wrung bravery in Aunt Judith's face. Only a passionate surge of feeling could have swept away the silence and repression of the years. Only a woman's emotion, wild and maternal for all its starving, inevitable as the law of God, could have leaped a barrier so fixed and unrelenting.

"Abner," she said desperately. "I — I want to keep Jimzy. I — I can't *bear* to see him go —"

"Judith!" There was more in the single word of course than Aunt Judith could know. There was an unread paper and a biscuit, a tailless dog invading sanctity, a yelling boy by a wood-pile, and now the memory of a twilight

## The Chain Clanks

ride and the tears of a choking lad upon his sleeve, an irritating record of moments of weakness which it behooved a first citizen to stamp out of his life forever. Aunt Judith read in his face an inexorable death-sentence of her hope and rose, trembling.

"You are a hard, cold man!" she said, very white. "And the house is so lonely I hate it! . . . I *hate* it!" quivered Aunt Judith with a long shuddering sob; "there's no one to love in it — no one! And everything Specks said to Jimsy was true!"

And then, crying and shaking, she was gone, and Abner Sawyer went with stumbling feet to the privacy of his workshop, his face death-white. The pompous illusions of his little world were tumbling to ruins about him.

He had said with frequent unction that he was a "hard" man, interpreting that phrase liberally in terms of thrift, economy and substantial common sense, and his world, through the mouth of an urchin, had flung back to him the galling words — *miser* and *skinflint*! They had fawned to his face and flouted his



## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

back, gossiping of servants and made-over gowns and kindlings. Up and down the quiet work-shop walked Abner Sawyer, clinging in an agony of humiliation to the loyalty of a little urchin. . . . It was all he had, he told himself fiercely, all he had! Jimsey alone saw him as he was and liked him. . . . No heart! . . . No Christmas tree! . . . No one in the house to love. . . . He must prove then to Specks — to Jimsey — to Judith — to the Middletons — to all Lindon —

Turning with hot anger in his heart, he saw a book upon his work-bench; and picking it up, Abner Sawyer faced the pitiful fiasco of Jimsey's Christmas gift. With a great lump in his throat and his eyes wet he glanced at the fly-leaf.

"To Uncle Ab," it said, "from Jimsey. Chrismus gretings."

The door clicked as it had clicked the night before and the night before.

"Unc — Mister Sawyer," said Jimsey sleepily. "I 'mos' forgot to come, I was so awful tired an' sleepy. . . . Ain't — ain't sick, are ye, Uncle Ab? Yer face is awful queer."

## The Chain Clanks

"I — I don't know," said the first citizen hoarsely. "I — I think I am. Go to bed, Jimsy, and — thank — you — for the book."

Jimsy went back to bed. He did not know — nor did Aunt Judith or Abner Sawyer that presently he was the sole keeper of the house save Stump snoring in the kitchen. For Abner Sawyer was furtively driving Peggy into a village that knew him only by repute and Aunt Judith, having slipped away in white defiance to Cousin Lemuel's down the road, was driving into Lindon with the surreptitious savings of many years in the old-fashioned pocket of her gown.







## V

### THE PROVING

THE clock struck six. It was Christmas morning! Jimsy awoke with the thought of turkey uppermost in his mind, to find Aunt Judith by his bed, a wonderful look of Christmas, he thought, in her gentle face.

"Dress quickly, Jimsy," she whispered, "and don't make a sound — not a sound! I'll wait outside by the door. It — it's a Christmas secret that nobody but you and I must know."

Jimsy tumbled into his clothes and opened the door.

"W-w-w-w-what is it, Aunt Judith?" he whispered.

But for answer Aunt Judith only hurried him in a flutter to the sewing-room, safe this many a year from the measured tread of first-citizen feet, and closed the door.

"Oh, Aunt Judith!" gulped the boy. "Aunt Judith!"

## The Proving

A Christmas tree winked and rainbow-bowed glory in a window by the eaves, everything beneath its tinselled branches that the heart of boy could wish. The radiance in Jimsy's eyes brought Aunt Judith to her knees beside him, her sweet, tired eyes wet with tears of pleasure.

"You like it, Jimsy?" she whispered. "You're sure you like it, dear?"

Jimsy buried his face on Aunt Judith's shoulder with a strangled sob of excitement and delight.

"Aunt Judith," he blurted, "I — I can't 'mos' tell ye what I think."

Aunt Judith's arms clung tightly to him.

"Cousin Lemuel helped me," she whispered. "The house was dark and Mr. Sawyer in bed. There wasn't even a light in the workshop. We tiptoed up and down the back-stairs. You mustn't breathe a word of it, Jimsy! Not a word! It's for you and me."

Jimsy sighed.

"Whisht," he said, "whisht Uncle Ab believed in Chris'mus."

Aunt Judith kissed him.



## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

"Bless your heart, Jimsey," she said bravely. "So do I."

But even bewildering hours with gifts and trees must come to an end, and presently Aunt Judith and Jimsey went down hand in hand to attend to the fire and breakfast. . . . And the opening of the sitting-room door froze Aunt Judith Sawyer to the threshold, her face whitely unbelieving. Something was wrong with the primness of the sitting-room — something in evergreen and tinsel and a hundred candles that showered Christmas from its boughs — something was wrong with Abner Sawyer — up and waiting by the window, his face twisted into a faint and sickly smile of apology.



For now that he was in the very heart of his "proving" he did not know what on earth to do. Dignity? . . . It was hopelessly out of the question. With a monument to his midnight guilt blazing there in the corner — with Christmas wreaths hung in the windows to confound the Middletons — he must face the music. Feeling very foolish, he cleared his throat and essayed to speak,

## The Proving

paralyzed into silence again by the unexpected evolution of a hoarse croak so horribly un-first-citizen that it frightened him.

Jimsey broke the staring silence.

"Uncle Ab," he quivered, "ye never — ye never went an' done all that fur me!"

"I — I don't know," said Abner Sawyer, swallowing very hard. "I — I think I did."

"When," faltered Aunt Judith from the doorway, "did you — do it?"

"It must have been after midnight. I came in very quietly. The ride was long — I went to Matsville. You must have been in bed asleep —"

Jimsey embarked upon a handspring of celebration.

"Two trees!" he shouted, caution quite forgotten in his wild excitement, "two suits of clothes — two everything! Oh, my gosh, Specks ain't in it. I'm the Christmas kid!" and then in a panic he was on his feet again, his face hot and red. "Aunt Judith," he exclaimed, almost crying, "I'm awfully sorry —"

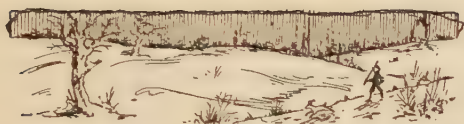


## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

Aunt Judith's tremulous laugh seemed tears and silver.

"Never mind, dear. It's all right now. Abner," she swallowed bravely, "one of — one of Jimsey's Christmas trees is in the sewing-room. I — I'd like you to see it."





## VI

### THE TRIUMPH

SPECKS reviewed the Christmas tree in the sitting-room after breakfast and looked upset. It was bigger than his own.

"Got one downstairs, too," crowed Jimsy. "Uncle Ab," he added, "he sort o' wanted it to be awful Christmasy through the whole house, an'—an' Jiminy Crickets, Specks, it is!"

"Uncle Ab — who's Uncle Ab?"

"Uncle Ab Sawyer." Jimsy bristled.

"What ye got to say about it?"

"Nuthin'."

"Did *you* get *two* trees, Specks?"

"Naw. Hain't many folks did, I guess. 'Tain't nuthin' to crow about, anyway."

"Huh! Thought ye said the Middletons was more Christmasy'n us."

"I didn't."

"Ye did."

"I didn't."

## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

"Ye did, too, and I walloped ye fur it. I'll wallop ye again if ye say ye didn't."

"Jimsey!" Aunt Judith's gentle voice put an end to controversy. An armistice was pledged.

"Did ye get skates, Specks?"

"Nope."

"Gosh, I'm sorry fur that. I got two pairs. Mebbe — Aunt Judith?"

"Yes, Jimsey?"

"Would ye mebbe mind me givin' Specks a pair o' skates? Mr. Middleton he ain't so Christmasy as you an' Uncle Ab —"

Specks swallowed hard and accepted this and the skates. But he could not forbear at least one shaft of triumph.

"I got a sled, Jimsey!"

"Huh!" said Jimsey. "So did I. Two of 'em."

It was too much. The street urchin in Specks came to the fore in a mighty wave of envy.

"Gawd!" he gulped.

Jimsey glowered.

"Hey!" he whispered fiercely. "Hain't ye got no decency?"



## The Triumph

Specks blushed apology and departed.

Later, Jimsy reviewed the Sawyer turkey with a reverential glisten in his eye.

"Specks!" he yelled from the kitchen window. "Yi, Specksy!"

"What d'ye want?"

"Come over an' see the turkey."

"Y'ain't got two, have ye?" demanded Specks with suspicion.

"Naw," said Jimsy. "One's enuff. This un's bigger'n the turkey Pete Goo-gan raffled off last Christmas eve."

So Specks returned to envy — for the house of Sawyer had outdone the house of Middleton once more — and Jimsy in a glow of noisy delight led him to rows of pies and a barrel of ruddy apples — to celery and tarts — to fruit cake and cranberries and simmering vegetables — in short to every home-keeping kitchen device for filling a country house with the odor of Christmas and the promise of good cheer. The Sawyer kitchen to-day was a wonderful place of shine and spice. Even Aunt Judith felt the nameless something in the air, for her cheeks were faintly pink and the





## Jimisy, the Christmas Kid

hand that smoothed her snowy apron trembled ever so little. Christmas had not come so this many a year.

But Specks departed this time with a furtive air of triumph.

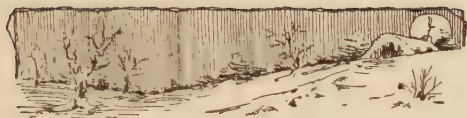
"Mr. Middleton ain't no stiff," he announced. "*He's* goin' out on the hill coastin' with me this afternoon —"

"S-s-s-s-h!" whispered Jimisy fiercely. "D'ye want Aunt Judith to hear ye? I git awful sick o' wallopin' you, Specks, but lemme hear ye say that again an' I'll baste ye good."

The kitchen door swung back. Specks paled, as well he might. The first citizen stood in the doorway, his mouth set.

"Jimisy," he said, clearing his throat. "Get your sled, my boy. We'd better try it out before dinner."

It was a challenge to the Middletons, of course, but afterwards, in a wild moment of panic, Abner Sawyer felt that he would have retracted at any cost had it not been for the wonderful glow in Jimisy's face. He felt a little sick. . . . God help him, he liked Jimisy! He wanted to please him!



## VII

### THE DOWNFALL

THE Lindon hill was full of watchers. That in itself was disconcerting. Wild spirits gather in the snow on Christmas morning. And it was, of course, like Jimsy to fling himself suddenly upon his sled with a whoop and go flying down the hill through the snow fleet, yelling wildly, but Abner Sawyer wished he had made his *début* a trifle less conspicuously. For it brought all eyes to Abner Sawyer himself standing stiffly upon the hill-top not quite sure of his ground. A neighbor or so eyed him in polite surprise and nodded; a child fastened round eyes upon his silk hat and he wished he had left it at home. But Christmas was no more Christmas than Sunday was Sunday without this formal head-piece, and besides, it had been his sole concession to the horrified stir of dignity within him when Jimsy

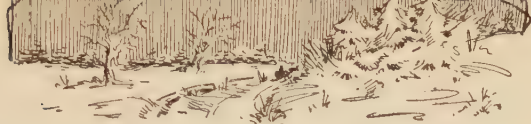
## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

had appeared upon the walk beside him dragging his sled. What on earth was he doing here anyway in the rough and tumble sport of a Christmas morning!

Yells of greeting followed Jimsey's meteoric flight down the hillside. Everybody seemed to know and like him, and Jimsey, as ever, was noisily responsive. Yes, he was more a part of this village of Lindon than the first citizen himself standing aloof upon the hill-top, and the first citizen had spent his life in Lindon. Abner Sawyer felt hurt and alone. He had slipped in an unwary moment from his wound-proof armor of conscious superiority and in this world of friends outside it, there was more room for Jimsey than there was for him. Small comfort, after all, the solitude of greatness!

The first citizen frowned impatiently. What was it all about, anyway, he wondered hopelessly. Did he want to be one of that yelling, shoving, jostling crowd? Surely not! His dignity rose in revolt at the very thought of it. Did he hunger for Jimsey's supreme gift of adaptability? Why should this fierce





## The Downfall

new hunger for one friendly, honest, heart-warming smile of liking and welcome gnaw at his heart? . . . Why — God help him! — why was he a stranger in his own town?

“The world is all wrong,” said Abner Sawyer, a little white; “I am not myself.” And for a wild moment his sore heart flamed again at Jimsy’s revolutionizing intrusion into the quiet smugness of his life.

Jimsy’s quick, eager little smile of greeting as he came up the hill again warmed the pang away — it was so full of good-fellowship and understanding.

“Ever go belly-whopper, Uncle Ab?” he demanded radiantly.

“I — I scarcely think so,” said the first citizen.

“I — I don’t like to belly-whop down the hill with you standin’ up here alone,” said Jimsy shyly. “Why don’t ye go down just once with me, Uncle Ab? Then if ye like it, we’ll just have one thump-walloper of a time!”

“No, no, Jimsy,” said the first citizen. “I — I can’t do that —” and then for the first time he met the amused



## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

eyes of Hiram Middleton and Specks.

So they had followed to the hill — incredulous and curious! A wave of anger swept Abner Sawyer into indiscretion.

“I — I’ll go with you once, Jimsey,” he said, and Jimsey’s round little face glowed.

So the first citizen seated himself stiffly on the sled behind Jimsey, wondering what on earth to do with his legs. They seemed to have lengthened mysteriously and they looked astonishingly thin. Jimsey gave a wild Indian whoop of warning and the sled hurtled off down the hill, with the first citizen, unbelievably stiff-legged and frightened, clinging to his hat.

His emotions were panoramic. There was panic first at his lost dignity — then wonder at their speed, but most of all his legs bothered him — his legs and his hat. He wished Jimsey would quit yelling. Yet for all he tried he could not bring himself to say so.

“Ki-yi-yi-yi-whoop!” sang Jimsey, steering. Abner Sawyer gulped. Everybody on the hill, of course, was

## The Downfall

staring; his coat-tails were flying dizzily behind him. There would be a scandal and the directors of the Lindon Bank might even meet and call him to account. Small blame to them. Abner Sawyer mentally sketched a caricature of himself — coat-tails, legs and all — and Heaven help him! — lost his hat. He emitted a feeble croak of dismay. Jimsy looking back steered into a snow-bank and dumped the president of the Lindon Bank out upon the hill.

"Gosh Almighty, Uncle Ab," he yelled, "I'm awful sorry. I seen your lid go —"

"Never mind, Jimsy," said the first citizen, sitting up, "never mind — I — I really shouldn't have worn such a wind-catcher to — to belly-whop in —"

He sat very stiff amid the ruins of the snow-bank. Jimsy grinned.

"Ye ain't really done no belly-whopin' yet," he said.

And now for the first time Abner Sawyer realized that everybody on the hill had come running at Jimsy's yell to see if he was hurt. . . . One was brushing him off . . . another had rescued his



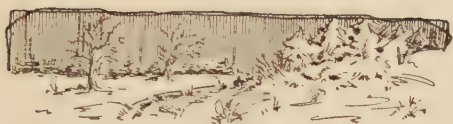
## Jimmy, the Christmas Kid

hat with a horrible un-first-citizen dent in it and a lump of snow on the brim . . . and they weren't shocked . . . they weren't laughing. . . . Why on earth should there be friendliness now in their gaze when he had seemed so far away from them standing up there on the hill? No scandalized amazement here at the downfall of Lindon's pride . . . he was somehow closer to them all.

It was Aunt Polly Magee, the self-appointed mother of the village, who finally stood the first citizen upon his feet and brushed the snow from his back.

"Dear me," she said, "that *was* a spill. When ye went down ye seemed 'mos' as leggy as a spider. Next time ye go coastin', Ab, ye'd better not wear your Sunday hat. 'Tain't no better'n a kite when it comes to wind."

Abner Sawyer's smile was vague and apologetic, but there was a fierce, wild joy in his heart that he didn't try to understand. He was glad he had lost his hat — he was glad he had fallen into the snow-bank — and he was glad Aunt Polly Magee had called him Ab for the first time in thirty years!



## VIII

### THE CHAIN IS LOCKED

LIKE a rainbow blur fled the Sawyer Christmas, punctuated with the yells and bangs of boyhood. From dawn to bed it was a triumph.

"Jimsy," said the first citizen at dusk, "has it — has it been what you'd call a — a walloper-thump —"

"Thump-walloper," corrected Jimsy.

"Thump-walloper of a day?"

Jimsy's reply was ecstatic.

"I 'mos' always forget," he added ruefully. "Aunt Judith said I mustn't call ye Uncle Ab. Which d'ye like best, Uncle Ab? Mister Sawyer or Uncle Ab?"

"I — I think," said the first citizen with a gulp, "that I like Uncle Ab a little better."

"So do I," said Jimsy.

With a wind-beaten flutter of wings, Jimsy's Christmas fled at midnight.



## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

Dawn grayed bleakly over the Sawyer home, and there came an hour when Peggy waited to carry Jimsey to the station. Nervous and irritable — why he did not know save that time was crowding and he must deliver Jimsey to the minister in time for the 8.32, Abner Sawyer strode resolutely to the kitchen door. But he did not summon Jimsey. Instead he turned a little white.

It was a common enough sight — a woman clinging to a child and crying — but Abner Sawyer was conscious of a swelling mutiny in his throat and a blur to his vision.

“Do-o-o-on’t cry, Aunt Judith!” gulped Jimsey courageously. “I’ll be as good as I know how. An’ you’ll be awful good to Stump, won’t ye, Aunt Judith? He’s lame an’ — an’ he’s had a fierce life.”

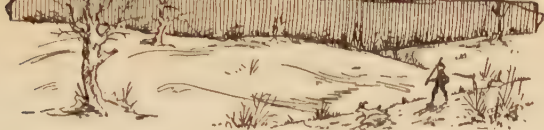
“Yes — yes —”

“An’ tell Uncle Austin White I sent him good-by.”

“Yes, Jimsey.”

“An’ — an’ write me every week ’bout ol’ Peggy an’ Uncle Ab an’ — an’ you, Aunt Judith. Don’t forget —”





## The Chain Is Locked

"Everything, dear!"

"Go-o-o-oby, Aunt Judith!"

"Oh, Jimsy! Jimsy!"

Abner Sawyer fled to his wagon with his hands upon his ears. It was the wildest sobbing he had ever heard. When Jimsy came, at last, looking very red and swollen, the first citizen was staring straight ahead.

Peggy finished at the station almost neck and neck with the train. The minister spoke to Mr. Sawyer and rushed Jimsy up the steps. A bell clanged. There was much noise and puffing and the train was under way. Jimsy, wildly remembering his good-by to Uncle Ab, flung up the train window and waved a frantic hand.

Then something happened.

A shaking hand touched the baggage-master.

"Stop the train!" said Abner Sawyer harshly. He was deathly white.

"It—it is important. I will pay if necessary."

It was unprecedented, but, thoroughly rural in his taste for sensation, the baggage-master leaped to the bottom step

## Jimsey, the Christmas Kid

of the nearest car and spoke to a brakeman. The brakeman glanced at the first citizen with respect. There was a hissing noise and a jerk. When the train rumbled to a stop again under the startled eyes of Lindon, Abner Sawyer was already striding up the aisle. With the intelligent eyes of the young minister upon him, he snatched Jimsey roughly from the seat, carried him down the aisle — down the steps — and over the platform to Peggy.

“W-what is it, Uncle Ab?” faltered the boy. “Did I — did I forget something?”

Abner Sawyer felt the boy's warm young cheek against his face and a great lump welled up in his throat. Something hot stung his eyes. The clasp of his arms tightened.

“Jimsey,” he said huskily, “you said I ought to give Aunt Judith a Christmas present, and I'm going to give her — *you!*”







